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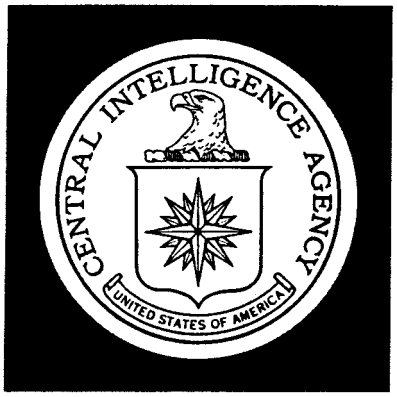

DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

The Sharpening Soviet Military Debate on Forces for the 1970's

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
13 December 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Sharpening Soviet Military Debate on Forces for the 1970's

Summary

Soviet military leaders have been engaged for several years in a debate over military strategy and force structure. The controversy has sharpened over the past year on questions of strategic offensive force levels, the ABM issue, and the need for more flexible conventional forces.

The debate, which surfaces in the military press, suggests that a determined fight is taking place for resource priorities as planning for the 1970's goes forward. It may also reflect differences of views within the Ministry of Defense on the potential risks and advantages of pursuing arms limitation talks.

Except for those military leaders with clear vested interests, such as the commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces and the commander of Warsaw Pact forces, the statements of the majority of key officers in the high command have not demonstrated any clear-cut alignment of sides in the debate. There is some evidence that the older marshals continue to favor a "massive retaliation" strategy and continued priority on strategic weapons.

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Younger officers such as Colonel General Povaliy, planning chief of the General Staff, appear to want a more flexible approach. They are more likely to be willing to balance the needs of the conventional forces against strategic programs.

The current round of the debate centers on the nature of modern war and its costs. Proponents of increased levels of offensive and defensive strategic forces argue from the theory that a future war would begin with a massive surprise attack by the US. They are pessimistic about the chances for advance warning and insist that the USSR must strive for strategic superiority, both offensive and defensive, if it is to maintain an effective retaliatory capability.

Those advocating expansion of conventional capabilities contend that the Soviet force ought to be more flexibly geared to meet a broader spectrum of military contingencies. This school of thought rejects the thesis that an East-West conflict would quickly escalate into an all-out nuclear exchange. This argument currently seems to have gained ground within the Soviet military establishment.

The question of resource allocation, the second theme, has been raised beyond the perennial one of defense versus the rest of the economy. Within the military establishment it is now debated in terms of strategic versus conventional weaponry. The allocation discussion also implies that cost effectiveness considerations may now have some weight in selecting weapon systems.

The outcome of the debate remains unclear. Both the General Staff publication Military Thought and the press organ of the military's Main Political Administration, Communist of the Armed Forces, carry articles reflecting divergent views on these questions. This suggests that the debate is being conducted at all levels of the Ministry of Defense.

Past Doctrinal and Force Structure Issues

1. The current arguments in the continuing doctrinal debate among Soviet military leaders parallel in many respects those of the 1965-1966 internal discussion on the state of the Soviet defense posture. At that time, the Soviet Union was apparently in the process of deciding to move ahead with large-scale ICBM deployment while simultaneously upgrading the role of the conventional forces from the doctrinal limbo into which they had fallen during the early 1960's. The arguments put forth by the military then were designed to remove the constraints imposed on the USSR's defense posture by Khrushchev's doctrine of minimal deterrence.

2. A statement earlier this year in the classified Soviet journal Military Thought indicates that these arguments have surfaced again. According to Maj. Gen. N. Sushko and Lt. Col. A. Kozlov, disagreement on the likelihood of war, and by implication disagreement over the most appropriate Soviet strategic posture, remain a weak point of Soviet military planning and doctrine. Sushko and Kozlov contend that it is erroneous and harmful to rely only on deterring war and to ignore the possibility that it may in fact occur. The continuing preparation of the United States to unleash a new war, the authors claim, requires that the USSR increase its defense strength and be in a position to use its power.

3. The springboard for the current debate is the issue of preparedness to meet the most likely challenges to Soviet power. Key issues in the debate include balancing immediate defense requirements against investment in economic growth to provide for the defense needs of the next decade, and determining the proper mix between strategic forces and those for "limited" military situations. Soviet policy on strategic arms limitation talks is also bound up in the same issues.

The Nature of Future East-West War

4. Divergent projections of the nature of the beginning period of an East-West war betray some vested-interest bias regarding the issue of force structure. The advocates of increased conventional weaponry have insisted that at least the beginning period of a major conflict will likely be confined to traditional military maneuvers. The advocates of expanded strategic offensive and defensive weaponry, on the other hand, contend that the initial period will be characterized by a surprise nuclear rocket attack. Each side has chosen to attack, from a different angle, the views of the late Marshal Sokolovskiy, whose works included three editions of the book Military Strategy.

5. According to Sokolovskiy, the USSR's ability to detect an enemy's preparation for a surprise nuclear attack would enable it to deal the enemy a "crushing blow of decisive significance." Sokolovskiy implied that current strategic forces maintained at a high level of combat readiness are sufficient to retaliate effectively. This view is now challenged by those who argue for a greater strategic force.

6. The opposing school--those who contend that strategic power has lost much of its utility under conditions of nuclear stalemate--argues against Sokolovskiy's view that any local war involving nuclear powers will inevitably escalate into a general nuclear war. This school contends that the Soviet Union ought to move faster in the development of its conventional forces.

The Case for Increased Strategic Capability

7. The theoretical question of strategic surprise is closely related to the practical issue of the strategic posture of the USSR. This was demonstrated in a June 1968 Military Thought article in which Maj. Gen. N. Vasendin and Col. N. Kuznetsov discussed the divergent Soviet views on the probability of a successful surprise attack against the USSR.

8. One view, they noted, plays down the importance of strong strategic defenses. This view (which is quite similar to Sokolovskiy's) holds that modern reconnaissance permits the discovery of "both the immediate preparation of an aggressor for an attack as well as the beginning of the first strike of his strategic nuclear means." With this warning, a high degree of combat readiness will ensure the "swift delivery of a crushing retaliatory strike."

9. The countering view contends that the probability of discovering an attack in preparation is sharply reduced at the present time, so the probability of surprise must be faced up to. The authors themselves conclude that the USSR must have both strong offensive and defensive forces. In their view, the delivery of a timely retaliatory nuclear strike requires "powerful and numerous" nuclear weapons and a "well-developed antimissile and anti-aircraft defense."

10. A concurrent article by a Colonel Grudinin, a participant in the 1966 debate, stated the argument for superiority over the West in strategic weapons in sharp and more polemical terms. Writing in the June 1968 Communist of the Armed Forces, Grudinin accused certain unspecified authors of failing to emphasize the necessity of overwhelming strategic superiority. The ability to concentrate superior forces "at a given moment and in the decisive direction," he said, derives primarily from superiority in nuclear rocket weapons.

11. These statements contain implicit arguments for increased strategic weapons procurement and for a military posture based on strategic superiority, both offensive and defensive. In addition, they are timely arguments against the initiation of strategic arms limitation talks. They argue, in effect, for a continuation of the strategic arms race with the West.

The Case for Flexibility

12. Advocates of a massive retaliation strategy espouse Sokolovskiy's contention that any East-West

military conflict would quickly escalate to an all-out nuclear exchange. The opposing school of thought contends that such a conflict could be kept at the conventional level for a significant period of time. One of the major arguments of this group is that strategic superiority is not an attainable goal for the USSR and that massive retaliation does not provide a practical outlet for Soviet military power.

13. Under Khrushchev, Soviet doctrine proclaimed that the escalation of a limited local conflict between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces was inevitable. It warned that the Soviet military response to Western "adventurism" would be immediate and massive. Since that time Soviet doctrine has shown signs of becoming more flexible.

14. Those advancing the cause of a more flexible strategy seem to have gained ground within the military establishment. Advocates of this strategy hold important command and staff positions in the military hierarchy. Colonel General Povaliy, planning chief of the General Staff, and Marshal of the Soviet Union Yakubovskiy, commander in chief of the Warsaw Pact forces, are probably the best known exponents of this strategy.

15. Povaliy has attacked Sokolovskiy's statements on the probability of escalation in a future war. He remarked in April 1968 to Western military attaches in Moscow that Sokolovskiy's Military Strategy was "obsolete" and that US officials would be wasting their time reading it. He explained that Soviet strategy has no label, but that the Soviet Union is "ready to meet whatever the situation requires."

16. In a March 1968 article in Red Star, Povaliy had given an unprecedented endorsement of the rationale underlying the US strategy of flexible response. His discussion of changes in NATO's strategy noted that massive retaliation had become "quite unrealistic and unconvincing." He surmised that NATO and the US would continue to endorse the policy of fighting future wars with the weapons that "correspond to the nature of the possible clash," and would try to achieve their goals with the use of only conventional weapons or tactical nuclear weapons.

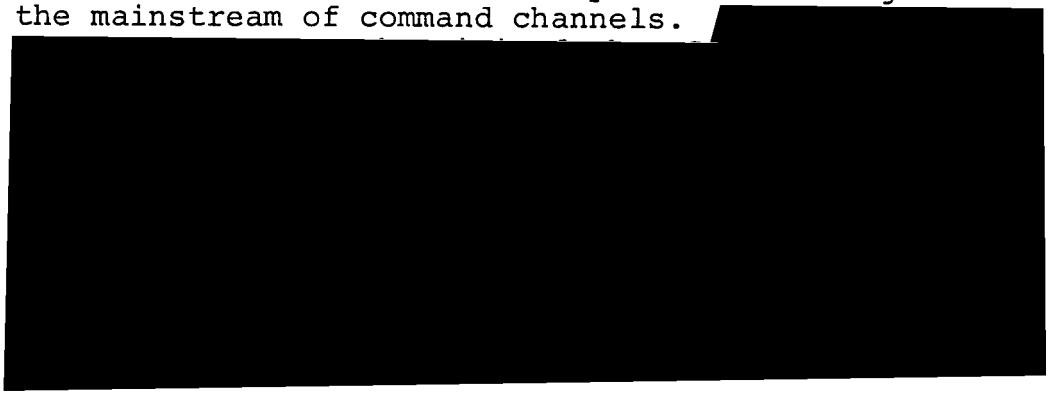
17. Still earlier Povaliy had extolled the benefits of a more flexible strategy. In a February 1967 article in Military Thought, he stated that the contending nuclear powers might not employ nuclear weapons in the beginning of a conflict or for some period thereafter, and that there would still be time to mobilize and deploy the armed forces and place the country's economy on a war footing.

18. The Povaliy articles are representative of the support that a large segment of the military establishment has given to a more flexible strategy. Articles in the military press over the past year have stressed the need for the armed forces to be prepared to conduct "world as well as limited wars, both with and without the use of nuclear weapons." Marshal Yakubovskiy argued in Red Star, 21 July 1967, that "in a whole range of circumstances," the ground forces must be ready for combat operations "without the use of nuclear weapons," employing conventional "classical" means of warfare.

19. Articles in Military Thought, moreover, have discussed hypothetical troop operations during the conventional phase of a future war between nuclear powers in Europe. Colonel Samorukov, writing in the August 1967 issue, acknowledged that the conventional phase would take place under the constant threat that nuclear weapons would be introduced and that the conventional phase would be a short one.

20. For the present, a more flexible strategy, both in Europe and in areas far distant from Soviet borders, appears to be under serious consideration. NATO's recent review of its troop strength policy in light of the events in Czechoslovakia--a review which forestalled planned NATO decreases--may also reinforce this position. Any major reduction in NATO troop strength probably would have increased the pressures that already exist within the Soviet Politburo and armed forces leadership to structure the military establishment on the primacy of nuclear weapons and retain the doctrine that considers massive retaliation the most reliable military strategy for the USSR.

21. The trend toward more diversified forces is opposed by a group composed mainly of older generals and marshals who for the most part are no longer in the mainstream of command channels.



22. Now, however, the compulsory retirement of senior Soviet officers, outlined in the October 1967 Military Service Law, apparently is being implemented. Under the new law, officers of the ranks of colonel general up to, but not including, marshals of the Soviet Union will for the first time be required to retire at the age of 60, unless the Council of Ministers grants a five-year extension. According to Army General I. Gusakovskiy, chief of the Main Personnel Administration of the Ministry of Defense, a major effort to execute this provision will be made this year and next.

23. The forced retirement provision will affect senior officers of the Ministry of Defense, the General Staff, and command staffs of military districts, paving the way for promotion of younger officers.

The Resource Allocation Issue

24. The issue of resource allocation has always been a sensitive one for the Soviet military establishment, but it has sharpened over the past year as the arguments over the relative emphasis that should be given to strategic and conventional weaponry have intensified.

25. Military press articles reflect new pressures on the military establishment to accept cost-effectiveness criteria for defense planning. One by Maj. Gen. A. Parkhomenko in Military Thought, January 1968, discussed various points of view about the relationship between defense resource allocation and the analysis of weapon systems.

26. According to Parkhomenko, one view maintains that the development and procurement of new armament should be accomplished without regard for cost, for any limitation might be detrimental to national security. A second point of view advocates the limitation of any type of expenditure for the sake of economy, national security considerations notwithstanding.

27. The author himself believes that economic factors are important insofar as they determine the more efficient way of improving military capability. According to Parkhomenko, economic criteria in the military field should "ensure the maximum increase in the combat capability of the armed forces at a definite level of expenditures of material resources for the purpose of always having military superiority over a probable enemy."

28. Maj. Gen. M. Cherednichenko, writing in Communist of the Armed Forces, August 1968, decried the fact that cost had become a prime factor in determining "military-technical superiority." He insisted that the qualitative aspects of a weapon system, rather than cost, must always remain the determining criteria.

29. The military's sensitivity to cost effectiveness restrictions reflects to some extent the pressures from elements of the political leadership to reduce defense spending. On the Politburo level, Premier Kosygin has argued that the future economic growth of the Soviet Union requires at least a leveling off of military spending. This summer he railed at the "catastrophic" size of the US military budget and he continues to favor US-Soviet talks to limit the strategic arms race.

30. Representatives of the various military branches and arms continue to try to protect their interests, however. Marshal Krylov, commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces, argued in February 1968 that military affairs cannot tolerate stagnation and called for "uninterrupted improvement" in the creation of new missiles. Marshal Yakubovskiy, on the other hand, soon after his promotion to commander of Warsaw Pact forces, warned in Red Star (21 July 1967) against giving a one-sided emphasis to the role and potential of nuclear weapons.

31. A more recent statement by a Major General Novikov has demonstrated in concrete terms the sensitivity of some military writers to this question. In a review for Red Star (28 June 1968) of the recently published Nuclear Weapons and the Development of Tactics, Novikov wrote that the book had serious shortcomings. "Here again," he wrote, "we have an instance of overestimating nuclear weapons, of overemphasizing their role in close combat, and of underestimating the potentials of conventional weapons."

32. The re-establishment of the post of commander in chief of ground forces in 1967 appears to reflect the upgrading of conventional forces in recent years. The post had been abolished in 1964 in the midst of a vigorous controversy over the role of the ground forces in modern war. The restoration of this post may strengthen the hand of ground force advocates in intraservice competition for resources.

33. The success of the proponents of balanced forces may have inspired the tone of a 19 November 1968 Pravda interview with Marshal Krylov. The usual one-sided, pro-strategic-missile quality of Krylov's statements was lacking. He conceded a sensitive doctrinal point by admitting that victory could be achieved "only" through the combined efforts of all branches of the armed forces.